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A U.S. Airways Express plane is prepared on the tarmac at Reagan National Airport, after a massive snow storm shut down air travel over the weekend, in Washington, on Monday, Dec. 21, 2009. The government has imposed a three hour limit on tarmac strandings at airports.

U.S. imposes 3-hour limit on tarmac strandings

JOAN LOWY, Associated Press Writer
WASHINGTON — Stinky toilets, crying babies, airless cabins — the Obama administration said Monday passengers don't have to take it any more. It ordered airlines to let people get off planes delayed on the ground after three hours. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said the three-hour limit and other new regulations are meant to send an unequivocal message to airlines not to hold passengers hostage on stuck

planes. Coming on the eve of the busy holiday travel season, the announcement was hailed by consumer advocates as "a Christmas miracle." The airline industry said it will comply with the regulations — which go into effect in 120 days — but predicted the result will be more canceled flights, more inconvenience for passengers. "The requirement of having planes return to the gates within a three-hour window or face significant fines is inconsistent with our goal of completing as many

flights as possible. Lengthy tarmac delays benefit no one," said Air Transport Association President and CEO James May.

Associated Press

Continued on Page 4

First Jesus-era house discovered in Nazareth

DIAA HADID
Associated Press Writer
NAZARETH, Israel (AP) — Just in time for Christmas, archaeologists on Monday unveiled what may have been the home of one of Jesus' childhood neighbors. The humble dwelling is the first dating to the era of Jesus to be discovered in Nazareth, then a hamlet of around 50 impoverished Jewish families where Jesus spent his boyhood. Archaeologists and present-day residents of Nazareth imagined Jesus as a youngster, playing with other children in the isolated village, not far from the spot where the Archangel Gabriel revealed to Mary that she would give birth to the boy. Today the ornate Basilica of the Annunciation marks that spot, and Nazareth is the largest Arab city in northern Israel, with about 65,000 residents.

Continued on Page 7

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Obama naming Hispanics to top posts at record pace



In this Aug. 8, 2009 file photo, Sonia Sotomayor smiles after taking the oath of office from U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts to become the Supreme Court's first Hispanic justice. The Obama administration has nominated nearly twice the number of Hispanics as either the Bush and Clinton administrations. Sotomayor served more than a decade as an appellate judge.

Associated Press

LAURA WIDES-MUNOZ
AP Hispanic Affairs Writer

MIAMI (AP) — President Barack Obama is on track to name more Hispanics to top posts than any of his predecessors, drawing appointees from a wide range of the nation's Latino communities, including Mexicans, Puerto

Ricans, Dominicans and Colombians.

That won't necessarily give the president a free pass on issues such as immigration, but it may ease Hispanics' worries about whether Obama will continue reaching out to a group that was key to his winning the White House. Supreme Court Justice Sonia

Sotomayor is by far Obama's most famous Hispanic appointee. In less than a year in office, the president has also tapped at least 48 other Hispanics to positions senior enough to require Senate confirmation. So far, 35 have been approved.

That compares with a total of 30 approved under former President Bill Clinton and 34 under former President George W. Bush during their first 20 months in office, according to U.S. Office of Personnel Management data.

The personnel office does not track appointments of judges or ambassadors. Early indicators suggest Obama is naming many Hispanics to those positions as well, though he has been slow to appoint judges in general.

"He's really captured our trajectory, and the vast, vast array of Latinos that make up our country, whether it's Mexicanos, Puertorriquenos or Dominicanos," said Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, the Cabinet's first Hispanic woman.

The officials cover a wide

swath of policy areas and include:

— Solis, a California native and former congresswoman whose parents hail from Mexico and Nicaragua.

— Thomas Perez, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, an Ivy Leager from New York whose parents fled the Dominican Republic dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.

— Jose Riojas, assistant secretary for veterans affairs, a retired brigadier general and Mexican-American from Missouri. In some ways, Obama is simply following his predecessor's example. Until the Obama administration, Bush's Cabinet was widely considered the most ethnically diverse in U.S. history, with Hispanics serving as secretaries of commerce and housing and as attorney general. Less than half of Obama's Cabinet consists of white men. Al Cardenas, a former chairman of the Florida Republican Party and a Cuban-American, said he was impressed by Obama's initial Hispanic appointments, particularly to positions in defense, treasury and housing, though he said he will be watching to see whether the pace falls off.

About half of Obama's picks trace their roots to Mexico and the former Spanish holdings in the Southwest, not surprising since two-thirds of Hispanics in the U.S. identify themselves as Mexican-American. But the administration also includes about half a dozen people of South American descent and nearly a dozen Hispanics from the Caribbean.

Oddly, that geographic and international diversity may come in part from Obama's lack of experience in working with Hispanics, said Matt Barreto, an associate professor at the University of Washington who studies Latino politics.

Bush had a long history of working with Mexican-Americans in Texas and had family and political connections to the Republican-

leaning Cuban-American community in Florida. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Obama's chief opponent during the primaries, had strong support from the Democratic Hispanic leadership in heavily Mexican-American Texas and California, and to some extent Florida. Obama didn't have those ties.

"In some ways, the Latino community benefits from being new to Obama outreach. He doesn't have the entrenched interests," Barreto said. More than half of the appointees hold an Ivy League degree, and more than a quarter, like the president, have a diploma from Harvard, an Associated Press review found.

Special counsel to the president Michael Camunez, one of the Harvard graduates, noted that a number of the Hispanic appointees, including himself and Solis, were the first in their families to attend college.

"It says a lot about our country that these people have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and have obtained a high degree of success," he said. "It is an American success story."

Professor Michael Jones-Correa, who studies Hispanic politics and immigration at Cornell University, said Latinos in the administration have ensured that immigration remained on the table when some advisers hoped to delay it until after next year's midterm elections.

The White House has signaled it wants to see an immigration bill next year, and last week, Rep. Luis Gutierrez, an Illinois Democrat, offered the first crack at comprehensive reform since 2007.

The most significant legacy of the Obama appointments may be a ways off, Jones-Correa said, noting that midlevel officials often go on to win major state and federal elections. "The real impact of these appointments, in my opinion, will be felt not in the next few years, but in the next 15 or 20," he said. □

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Maine to consider cell phone cancer warning

By GLENN ADAMS

Associated Press Writer

AUGUSTA, Maine – A Maine legislator wants to make the state the first to require cell phones to carry warnings that they can cause brain cancer, although there is no consensus among scientists that they do and industry leaders dispute the claim.

The now-ubiquitous devices carry such warnings in some countries, though no U.S. states require them, according to the National Conference of State Legislators. A similar effort is afoot in San Francisco, where Mayor Gavin Newsom wants his city to be the nation's first to require the warnings.

Maine Rep. Andrea Boland, D-Sanford, said numerous studies point to the cancer risk, and she has persuaded legislative leaders to allow her proposal to come up for discussion during the 2010 session that begins in January, a session usually reserved for emergency and governors' bills.

Boland herself uses a cell phone, but with a speaker to keep the phone away from her head. She also leaves the phone off unless she's expecting a call. At issue is radiation emitted by all cell phones.

Under Boland's bill, manufacturers would have to put labels on phones and packaging warning of the potential for brain cancer associated with electromagnetic radiation. The warnings would recommend that users, especially children and pregnant women, keep the devices away from their head and body.

The Federal Communications Commission, which maintains that all cell phones sold in the U.S. are safe, has set a standard for the "specific absorption rate" of radiofrequency energy, but it doesn't require handset makers to divulge radiation levels.

The San Francisco proposal would require the display of the absorption rate level next to each phone in print at least as big as the price. Boland's bill is not specific about absorption rate levels, but would require a permanent, nonremovable advisory of risk in black type, except for the word "warning," which would be large and in red letters. It would also include a color graphic of a child's brain next to the warning.

While there's little agreement about the health hazards, Boland said Maine's roughly 950,000 cell phone users among its 1.3 million residents "do not know what the risks are."

All told, more than 270 million people subscribed to cellular telephone service last year in the United States, an increase from 110 million in 2000, according to CTIA-The Wireless Association. The industry group contends the devices are safe.

"With respect to the matter of health effects associated with wireless base stations and the use of wireless devices, CTIA and the wireless industry have always been guided by science, and the views of impartial health organizations. The peer-reviewed scientific evidence has overwhelmingly indicated that wireless devices do not pose a public health risk," said CTIA's

John Walls.

James Keller of Lewiston, whose cell phone serves as his only phone, seemed skeptical about warning labels. He said many things may cause cancer but lack scientific evidence to support that belief. Besides, he said, people can't live without cell phones.

"It seems a little silly to me, but it's not going to hurt anyone to have a warning on there. If they're really concerned about it, go ahead and put a warning on it," he said outside a sporting good store in Topsham. "It wouldn't deter me from buying a phone."

While there's been no long-term studies on cell phones and cancer, some scientists suggest erring on the side of caution. Last year, Dr. Ronald B. Herberman, director emeritus of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, sent a memo to about 3,000 faculty and staff members warning of risks based on early, unpublished data. He said that children should use the phones only for emergencies because their brains were still developing and that adults should keep the phone away from the head and use a speakerphone or a wireless headset.

Herberman, who says scientific conclusions often take too long, is one of numerous doctors and researchers who have endorsed an August report by retired electronics engineer L. Lloyd Morgan. The report highlights a study that found significantly increased risk of brain tumors from 10 or more years of cell phone or cordless phone use.

Also, the BioInitiative Working Group, an international group of scientists, notes that many countries have issued warnings and that the European Parliament has passed a resolution calling for governmental action to address concerns over health risks from mobile phone use. But the National Cancer Institute said studies thus far have turned up mixed and inconsistent results, noting that cell phones did not come into widespread use in the United States until the 1990s.

"Although research has not consistently demonstrated a link between cellular telephone use and cancer, scientists still caution that further surveillance is needed before conclusions can be drawn," according to the Cancer Institute's Web site.

Motorola Inc., one of the nation's major wireless phone makers, says on its Web site that all of its products comply with international safety guidelines for radiofrequency energy exposure. A Motorola official referred questions to CTIA. □



A traveler who was delayed by the blizzard that struck the East Coast on Saturday makes a cell phone call at Union Station in Washington, Sunday, Dec. 20, 2009.

Associated Press

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In this Feb. 14, 2007, file photo taken with a cell phone, stranded passengers aboard JetBlue Flight 751 to Cancun walk around the cabin, while waiting hours to take off at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

TARMAC STRANDINGS

Continued from Front Page

LaHood, however, dismissed that concern.

"I don't know what can be more disruptive to people than to be stuck sitting on a plane five, six, seven hours with no explanation," LaHood said at a briefing.

Associated Press

This year through Oct. 31, there were 864 flights with taxi out times of three hours or more, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Transportation officials, using 2007 and 2008 data, said there are an average of 1,500 domestic flights a year carrying about 114,000

passengers that are delayed more than three hours.

Last month, the department fined Continental Airlines, ExpressJet Airlines and Mesaba Airlines \$175,000 for their roles in a nearly six-hour tarmac delay in Rochester, Minn.

In August, Continental Express Flight 2816 en route to Minneapolis was diverted to Rochester due to thunderstorms. Forty-seven passengers were kept overnight in a cramped plane because Mesaba employees refused to open a gate so that they could enter the closed airport terminal.

It was the first time the department had fined an airline for actions involving a ground delay. Transportation officials made clear the case was a warning to the industry. Under the new regulations, the only exceptions to the

requirement that planes must return to the gate after three hours are for safety or security or if air traffic control advises the pilot in command that returning to the terminal would disrupt airport operations.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said she thought the 3-hour rule would not cause any problems for security. "I can't imagine it would. I call it the rule of common sense," she said.

Airlines could be fined \$27,500 per passenger for each violation of the three-hour limit.

The regulations apply to domestic flights. U.S. carriers operating international flights departing from or arriving in the United States must specify, in advance, their own time limits for deplaning passengers. Foreign carriers do not fly between two U.S. cities and are not covered by the rules.

Tarmac strandings have mostly involved domestic flights, but the department is studying extending the three-hour limit to international flights, LaHood said.

"This is the beginning," LaHood said. "We think we owe it to passengers to really look out for them."

Airlines will be required to provide food and water for passengers within two hours of a plane being delayed on a tarmac, and to maintain

operable lavatories.

They must also provide passengers with medical attention when necessary.

Airlines will also be prohibited from scheduling chronically delayed flights. They must designate an employee to monitor the effects of flight delays and cancellations and respond to consumer complaints. And they would have to post flight delay information on their Web sites. Carriers who fail to comply could face government enforcement action for using unfair or deceptive trade practices.

Provisions sponsored by Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., and Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, in pending legislation would also impose a three-hour limit, but the new regulations go even farther, giving passenger rights advocates many of the reforms they've sought for years.

"No more will they be able to strand passengers for over three hours in hot, sweaty, metal tubes," said Kate Hanni, founder of Flyersrights.org. Hanni, who called the rules a Christmas miracle, was stuck on an American Airlines jet in Austin, Texas, for over nine hours in December 2006 when storms forced the closure of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, stranding more than 100 planes. □

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3 friends sentenced in NH Walmart worker slaying

By JOHN CURRAN

Associated Press Writer

NORTH HAVERHILL, N.H.

— Denounced as “evil” and “despicable,” three young friends who plotted the killing of a developmentally disabled Walmart cashier who had been hitting on a co-worker drew long prison terms Monday.

Timothy Smith, Anthony Howe and Amber Talbot, who pleaded guilty to murder and conspiracy in the October 2008 death of 25-year-old Christopher Gray, sat at adjoining tables in court as the victim’s family members tearfully remembered him and berated his killers.

“Just remember that night,” said David Kemp, 33, Gray’s brother. “I hope it eats you and eats you and eats you until can’t take it (any) longer.”

Smith and Howe each got 40 years to life and Talbot 25 to 50 years for taking the Groton, Vt., man to a mobile home under the pretext of watching movies. There, Smith, 24, and Howe, 19, who are cousins, stabbed and strangled him as they stood around a campfire.

Gray, an aspiring auto mechanic whose buoyant personality helped him overcome a low IQ, attention deficit disorder and a speech impediment, became a target after wooing Talbot, 18, who also worked at the Woodsville Walmart. Her boyfriend, Michael Robie, 19, became enraged when he heard about it and plotted revenge, enlisting the other three from

his cell. Robie, who was heard discussing the attack in tape-recorded telephone calls from jail, has pleaded guilty to assault and conspiracy.

He is awaiting sentencing.

On the night Gray went missing, Walmart surveillance video showed the three picking him up after work at the Woodsville store, before they drove to Talbot’s home. “He was only there because he wanted you to be his friend,” his father, Michael Gray, told them Monday.

Talbot hung her head, her brown hair falling in her face, as Gray’s “mom,” legal guardian Annie Crowley, 38, of Groton, Vt., chided her as the one who lured Gray.

“Are you more than just a stupid girl that who caught up with the wrong crowd?” she told Talbot, standing at a podium in the hushed courtroom. “I think so. I believe all the young men involved are your victims.”

Crowley, who had been his guardian for about two years before his death, broke down in tears as she read her statement. “How am I supposed to live with myself, knowing that I was his guardian? I was supposed to be looking out for him,” she said.

Shirley Kingsbury, Gray’s aunt, stood by the podium as Assistant Attorney General Jeffery Strelzin read her statement for her.

“You are despicable human beings,” he read from her statement. “My heart is

broken forever.” Smith, who had confessed to the killing in a handwritten letter to Gray’s family after the slaying, apologized again Monday.

“I see Chris every time I try to sleep. No matter how many times I say I’m sorry, I can’t bring him back. But I wish I could. That night, I should’ve told Chris what we planned on doing, and not to come,” Smith said.

Before the sentencings, Gray’s family and friends threw an appreciation luncheon for police and prosecutors from Vermont and New Hampshire who cracked the case.

A dozen uniformed officers and plainclothes detectives received lapel pins from Crowley in an informal ceremony before sitting down to a buffet lunch at a



Three friends who played a part in the killing of a developmentally disabled Wal-Mart cashier in New Hampshire last year from far left, Timothy Smith, third from left, Anthony Howe, and fifth from left Amber Talbot are seen in Grafton County Superior Court in North Haverhill, N.H. Monday Dec. 21, 2009. All three were sentenced for their part in the killing of Christopher Gray.

Associated Press

community organization’s office in nearby Wells River, Vt.

“It was my honor to work on this case,” said Assistant New Hampshire Attorney General

Lucy Carrillo, as she stepped up to have Crowley pin her.

“We just felt it was important that they be recognized for the work they put into it,” said Crowley. □

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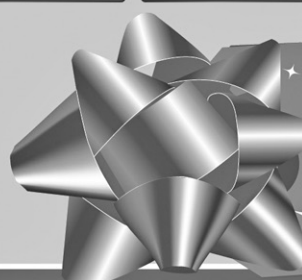
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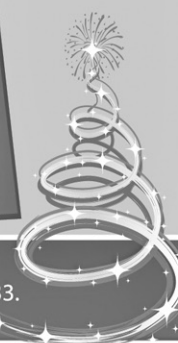
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Iran nuclear negotiator calls for atomic arms ban



Iran's top nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili attends a news conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo, Japan, Monday, Dec. 21, 2009.

Associated Press

MALCOLM FOSTER
 Associated Press Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Iran's chief nuclear negotiator called for a global nuclear weapons ban on Monday but insisted all

nations — including his own — have the right to develop nuclear energy. Visiting Tokyo to meet with senior Japanese officials, Saeed Jalili said his country's

nuclear program is for civilian purposes, although the U.S. and other nations fear its goal is to produce weapons.

"The crime that was committed in Hiroshima must never be repeated," Jalili told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, referring to the United States' dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, at the end of World War II.

"All the efforts of the world should be directed toward the eradication of these weapons," he said.

The administration of President Barack Obama — who has also called for a world free of nuclear weapons — has given a rough deadline of year-end for Iran to respond to an offer of engagement and show that it would allay world concerns about its nuclear program.

At the same time that it is trying to engage with Iran, the Obama administration has also been building momentum toward imposing more sanctions after the revelation in September that Iran was secretly building a second uranium-enrichment facility near the holy city of Qom.

In Paris on Monday, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said the international community has no other choice but to impose new U.N. sanctions on Iran for its refusal to cooperate on its

nuclear program.

Kouchner said Russia was already "on board" with the need for sanctions, and that he believed "the Chinese will follow."

"I think there is no other solution," Kouchner told journalists.

America's top military officer agreed Monday that Tehran shows no sign of backing down in the standoff and said that military force must therefore remain an option.

"My belief remains that political means are the best tools to attain regional security and that military force will have limited results," Adm. Mike Mullen wrote in an annual assessment of the nation's risks and priorities. "However, should the president call for military options, we must have them ready."

U.S. Sen. John McCain, Republican of Arizona, emphasized to television network ABC on Monday, however, that "sanctions have to be tried before we explore the last option," like a military attack.

For now, the U.S. and its allies are pressing Tehran to accept a U.N.-brokered plan under which Iran would ship the majority of its low-enriched uranium out of the country. That would temporarily leave Iran without enough uranium stockpiles to enrich further to

produce a nuclear weapon.

Under the plan, the low-enriched uranium would be converted into fuel rods that would be returned to Iran for use in a research reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes. Fuel rods cannot be further enriched into weapons-grade material.

Iran has balked at the plan, and Jalili dodged questions Monday about Tehran's response to it. He accused the West of trying to "monopolize" the nuclear fuel supply by rejecting Iranian offers to buy fuel rods for its research reactor and then by making conditions on the uranium swap.

The U.N.-brokered plan was seen by the U.S. and its negotiating partners as a step toward building confidence in Iran's claim that its nuclear program is designed only for civilian pursuits — medical purposes and to generate electricity.

"The Tehran reactor is for pharmaceutical use, for humanitarian use," Jalili said. "Using nuclear energy is the right of every nation."

On Monday, Jalili, who will visit Hiroshima this week, met with Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada, who voiced strong concern over Iran's nuclear program, according to a Foreign Ministry official who declined to be named. □



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NAZARETH

Continued from Front Page

Muslims now outnumber Christians two to one in the noisy, crowded city.

The archaeological find shows how different it was 2000 years ago: There were no Christians or Muslims, the Jewish Temple stood in Jerusalem and tiny Nazareth stood near a battleground between Roman rulers and Jewish guerrillas.

The Jews of Nazareth dug camouflaged grottos to hide from Roman invaders, said archaeologist Yardena Alexandre, excavations director at the Israel Antiquities Authority. But the hamlet was so far off the beaten path that the caves were apparently not needed, she said.

Based on clay and chalk shards found at the site, the dwelling appeared to house a "simple Jewish family," Alexandre added, as workers carefully chipped away at mud with small pickaxes to reveal stone walls.

"This may well have been a place that Jesus and his contemporaries were familiar with," Alexandre said. A young Jesus may have played around the house with his cousins and friends. "It's a logical suggestion."

The discovery so close to Christmas pleased local Christians.

"They say if the people do not speak, the stones will speak," said the Rev. Jack Karam of the nearby basilica.

Archaeologist Stephen Pfann, president of the University of

The Holy Land, noted: "It's the only witness that we have from that area that shows us what the walls and floors were like inside Nazareth in the first century." Pfann was not involved in the dig.

Alexandre said workers uncovered the first signs of the dwelling last summer, but it became clear only this month that it was a structure from the days of Jesus.

Alexandre's team found remains of a wall, a hideout, a courtyard and a water system that appeared to collect water from the roof and supply it to the home.

The discovery was made when builders dug up the courtyard of a former convent to make room for a new Christian center, just yards from the Basilica.

It is not clear how big the dwelling is. Alexandre's team has uncovered about 900 square feet of the house, but it may have been for an extended family and could be much larger, she said.

Archaeologists also found a camouflaged entry way into a grotto, which Alexandre believes was used by Jews to hide from Roman soldiers who were battling Jewish rebels for control of the area.

The grotto could have hidden around six people for a few hours, she said.

However, Roman soldiers did not end up battling Nazareth's Jews because the hamlet had little strategic value.

The Roman army was more interested in larger towns and

strategic hilltop communities, she said.

Alexandre said similar camouflaged grottos were found in other ancient Jewish communities of the lower Galilee, such as the nearby biblical village of Cana, which did witness battles between Jews and Romans.

Archaeologists also found clay and chalk vessels likely used by Galilean Jews of the time. The scientists concluded a Jewish family lived there because of the chalk, which Jews used to ensure the ritual purity of the food and water kept inside the vessels.

The shards also date back to the time of Jesus, which includes the late Hellenic, early Roman period that ranges from around 100 B.C. to the first century, Alexandre said. The determination was made by comparing the findings to shards and remains typical of that period found in other parts of the Galilee, she said. The absence of any remains of glass vessels or imported products suggested the people who lived in the dwelling were simple, but Alexandre said the remains did not indicate whether they were traders or farmers.



Reverend Jack Karam, left, stands near Israel's Antiquities Authority workers at the excavation site of the remains of the first dwelling in Nazareth, Israel that can be dated back to the time of Jesus, Monday, Dec. 21, 2009. Archaeologist Yardena Alexandre, unseen, of the Israel Antiquities Authority says remains of a wall, a hideout and a cistern were found after builders dug up an old convent courtyard in the northern Israeli city.

Associated Press

The only other artifacts from the time of Jesus found in the Nazareth area are ancient burial caves that provided a rough idea of the village's population at the time, Alexandre said.

Work is now taking place to clear newer ruins built above the dwelling, which will be preserved.

The dwelling will become part of a new international Christian center being built close to the site and funded by a French Roman Catholic

group, said Marc Hodara of the Chemin Neuf Community overseeing construction.

Alexandre said limited space and population density makes it unlikely that archaeologists can carry out further excavations in the area, leaving this dwelling to tell the story of what Jesus' boyhood home may have looked like.

The discovery at "this time, this period, is very interesting, especially as a Christian," Karam said. "For me it is a great gift." □

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Mexico City assembly legalizes same-sex marriage

E. EDUARDO CASTILLO

Associated Press Writer

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico City lawmakers on Monday made the city the first in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage, a change that will give homosexual couples more rights, including allowing them to adopt children.

The bill passed the capital's local assembly 39-20 to the cheers of supporters who yelled: "Yes, we could! Yes, we could!"

Leftist Mayor Marcelo Ebrard of the Democratic Revolution Party was widely expected to sign the measure into law.

Mexico City's left-led assembly has made several decisions unpopular elsewhere in this deeply Roman Catholic country, including legalizing abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. That decision sparked a backlash, with the majority of Mexico's other 32 states enacting legislation declaring life begins at conception.

The conservative Nation Action Party of President

Felipe Calderon has vowed to challenge the gay marriage law in the courts. However, homosexuality is increasingly accepted in Mexico, with gay couples openly holding hands in parts of the capital and the annual gay pride parade drawing tens of thousands.

The bill calls for changing the definition of marriage in the city's civil code. Marriage is currently defined as the union of a man and a woman. The new definition will be "the free uniting of two people." The change would allow same-sex couples to adopt children, apply for bank loans together, inherit wealth and be included in the insurance policies of their spouse, rights they were denied under civil unions allowed in the city.

"We are so happy," said Temistocles Villanueva, a 23-year-old film student who celebrated by passionately kissing his boyfriend outside the city's assembly.

Only seven countries allow gay marriages: Canada, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium. U.S. states that permit same-sex marriage

are Iowa, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and New Hampshire.

Argentina's capital became the first Latin American city to legalize same-sex civil unions in 2002 for gay and lesbian couples. Four other Argentine cities later did the same, and as did Mexico City in 2007 and some Mexican and Brazilian states. Uruguay alone has legalized civil unions nationwide.

Buenos Aires lawmakers introduced a bill for legalizing gay marriage in the national Congress in October but it has stalled without a vote, and officials in the South American city have blocked same-sex wedding because of conflicting judicial rulings. Many people in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America remain opposed to gay marriage, and the dominant Roman Catholic Church has announced its opposition.

"They have given Mexicans the most bitter Christmas," said Armando Martinez, the president of the College of Catholic Attorneys. "They are permitting adoption (by gay couples) and in one stroke of



Gay rights activists Nadia Rosso, 23, left, and Denise Temin, 27, kiss fellow activist Selene Flores, 23, as they celebrate the legalization of same-sex marriage at Mexico City's local assembly, Monday, Dec. 21, 2009. Mexico's capital's lawmakers made the city the first in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage, a change that will give homosexual couples more rights, including allowing them to adopt children.

Associated Press

the pen have erased the term 'mother' and 'father.'"

City lawmaker Victor Romo, a member of the mayor's leftist party, called it a historic day.

"For centuries unjust laws banned marriage between blacks and whites or Indians and Europeans," he said. "Today all barriers have disappeared." □



Aruba TODAY

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FILE - In this Nov. 1, 2007 file photo, Actress Brittany Murphy, right, and husband, writer Simon Monjack, left, at the BAFTA/LA Cunard Britannia Awards in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Fire Department has responded to a 911 call from the home of actress Brittany Murphy's husband. Fire Department spokesman Devon Gale says the call was made at 8 a.m. Sunday from a home in Los Angeles that is listed as belonging to British screenwriter Simon Monjack, who is married to Murphy. Gale says one person was transported to a hospital. (AP Photo/Dan Steinberg, File)

By ANTHONY McCARTNEY,
AP Entertainment Writer
LOS ANGELES — Brittany Murphy was ill with flu-like

Family: Brittany Murphy was ill days before death

symptoms in the days before her death and prescription medications were taken from her home, the Los Angeles coroner's office said Monday. The 32-year-old star of films such as "Clueless" and "8 Mile" died Sunday morning after collapsing at her Hollywood Hills home. Paramedics tried to revive her, but she was pronounced dead at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Police said there was no evidence of foul play. Assistant Chief Coroner Ed Winter said they will conduct an autopsy Monday to try to determine what killed the actress, and said her death appeared to be from natural causes. He said the illness, reported to officials by her family, could have contributed to her death, but it will be weeks before a final determination is made. Toxicology tests will be performed, and officials will contact her personal physician to get a better sense of Murphy's medical history, Winter said.

Neighbor Clare Staples said she saw firefighters working to resuscitate the actress Sunday

morning. She said Murphy was on a stretcher.

Murphy's husband, wearing pajama bottoms and no shoes, appeared "dazed" as firefighters tried to save her, Staples said. "It's just tragic," she added.

Police investigators went to Murphy's home Sunday to launch a standard death investigation. Detective Wendi Berndt, who supervises the Los Angeles Police Department's homicide unit in Hollywood, said there was nothing to indicate suspicious activity.

"We went to the scene to see if there was anything that suggests foul play, and there wasn't," she said.

Funeral arrangements have not been announced.

"The sudden loss of our beloved Brittany is a terrible tragedy," Murphy's husband and family wrote in a statement. "She was our daughter, our wife, our love, and a shining star. We ask you to respect our privacy at this difficult time."

Murphy's death put "Saturday Night Live" in an awkward spot. Two weeks ago, the NBC show aired a sketch during

"Weekend Update" in which cast member Abby Elliott performed an impression of Murphy, who had recently been fired from a film project. The impression portrayed Murphy as spacey and living in the past.

After her death Sunday, the sketch disappeared from Hulu.com, the online video repository co-owned by NBC Universal.

The quiet removal prompted many bloggers and online viewers to question the sketch's tastefulness and the decision to erase it without notice. A publicist for "Saturday Night Live" didn't respond to requests for comment.

Murphy moved to Los Angeles with her mother, Sharon, in the early 1990s. Her career started with small roles in television series, commercials and movies, but her part in "Clueless" led to larger projects.

She is best known for parts in "Girl, Interrupted" and "8 Mile," and also voiced the character Luanne Platter for more 200 episodes on Fox's animated series "King of the

Hill."

Her role in "8 Mile" led to more recognition, Murphy told AP in 2003. "That changed a lot," she said. "That was the difference between people knowing my first and last name as opposed to not."

She married British screenwriter Simon Monjack in 2007.

Murphy's father, Angelo Bertolotti, said he learned of her death from his son, the actress's brother, and was stunned.

"She was just an absolute doll since she was born," Bertolotti said from his Branford, Fla., home. "Her personality was always outward. Everybody loved her — people that made movies with her, people on a cruise — they all loved her. She was just a regular gal."

He said he hadn't heard much about the circumstances of Murphy's death. Bertolotti divorced her mother when Murphy was young and hadn't seen Murphy in the past few years.

"She was just talented," Bertolotti said. "And I loved her very much."

Stern's threat to quit Sirius could be empty talk



FILE - In this Dec. 18, 2009 file photo, radio host Howard Stern and his wife, Beth Ostrosky, talk while attending an NBA basketball game between the New York Knicks and Los Angeles Clippers, in New York. Howard Stern is threatening to leave Sirius XM Radio Inc. now that the shock jock and the satellite radio provider are getting set to enter contract talks in 2010.

By DEBORAH YAO,
AP Business Writer

Howard Stern is threatening to leave Sirius XM Radio Inc. now that the shock jock and the satellite radio provider are getting set to enter contract talks in 2010.

That threat probably seems less

(AP Photo/Kathy Kmonicek, file)

daunting to Sirius than it once would have. Sirius originally wanted Stern so badly that it gave him the most lucrative radio contract ever, a five-year deal that started in 2006 and paid him \$500 million in cash and stock.

Today, he doesn't have many

places left to go — at least if he wants another huge payday.

Free radio stations are struggling with steep drops in advertising and high debt loads, and probably can't pay top dollar to get Stern back to the medium where he began. He also likely would chafe at being censored again after enjoying the freedom of satellite radio, where his racy banter hasn't been subject to federal restrictions on language and content.

He can't switch to another satellite radio provider — Sirius swallowed the only other one, XM, last year.

So if Stern, 55, does re-sign with Sirius, it's likely to be for less this time around.

Sirius nearly had to file for bankruptcy protection this year and is still trying to reduce costs. The company is feeling the brunt of weak auto sales, which deliver many of its new customers. And it faces new threats from emerging commercial-free rivals such

as Internet radio.

For these reasons — and because Stern has warned other times that he might quit or retire — his latest threat rings hollow to some analysts. "It's probably positioning for contract negotiations," said Brett Harriss, an analyst at Gabelli & Co., whose parent Gamco Investors Inc. owns 1.1 million shares of Sirius. "I don't think he would give up his bullhorn."

Sirius' chief executive, Mel Karmazin, told The Associated Press in a recent interview that he will work hard to retain Stern, but the company would not offer more detailed comments. Stern's agent, Don Buchwald, did not respond to requests for comment.

Stern made his name on traditional or "terrestrial" radio. While Sirius mainly makes its money from selling subscriptions, the money that flowed to Stern on traditional radio came from syndication rights. In that setup, radio

stations pay companies that distribute programs such as Stern's.

Many of those radio stations have struggled since Stern left the free airwaves, and the recession compounded the problems. In the first nine months of the year, radio advertising revenue fell by 21 percent to \$11.8 billion, according to the Radio Advertising Bureau.

Citadel Broadcasting Corp., the nation's third-largest operator of radio stations, filed for bankruptcy protection Sunday. Other big station owners also are wrestling with debts, and the syndication division of the largest station owner, Clear Channel Communications Inc., already is believed to be paying Rush Limbaugh \$400 million over an eight-year contract. "Who else can afford Howard Stern?" Harriss said. When Stern signed with Sirius, the company trailed XM Satellite Radio Holdings Inc. in the race for customers.

BUSINESS

Aruba TODAY

Merger news, analyst upgrades drive stocks higher

By STEPHEN BERNARD
and SARA LEPRO,
AP Business Writers

NEW YORK – Another wave of corporate dealmaking stoked investors' confidence in the economy and carried stocks sharply higher Monday.

Analyst upgrades of Alcoa Inc. and Intel Corp. and positive momentum on President Obama's health care overhaul also helped drive a broad advance on the stock market. Major indexes closed off their highs of the day but still rose about 1 percent. The Dow Jones industrial average jumped into the black for the month.

Bond prices tumbled as stocks rose, pushing the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note up to its highest level since August. The dollar strengthened, hurting commodities prices.

Stocks got an early boost Monday after French drug maker Sanofi-Aventis SA announced plans to buy U.S. health care products company Chattem Inc. for \$1.9 billion, while mining equipment maker Bucyrus International Inc. said it planned to buy Terex Corp.'s mining equipment division for \$1.3 billion. Dutch automaker

Spyker Cars submitted a new offer to buy Saab from General Motors Co.

Robert Pavlik, chief market strategist at Banyan Partners, said the flurry of corporate deal activity is an encouraging sign of strength in the economy.

"Companies are revealing that they are in a better position financially," he said. "If they weren't feeling as confident, you wouldn't see this type of activity occurring."

The deals announced Monday follow Exxon Mobil Corp.'s \$29 billion takeover of XTO Energy Inc. last week.

In other corporate news, aluminum maker Alcoa Inc. announced an \$11 billion joint venture in Saudi Arabia. The deal, along with an analyst's upgrade of the stock, drove Alcoa shares up nearly 8 percent, making it the best performer among the 30 stocks that make up the Dow.

An upgrade of chip maker Intel Corp. helped boost technology stocks, while health care stocks rose broadly as a historic health bill moved closer to passage in the Senate.

The Dow rose 85.25, or 0.8 percent, to 10,414.14, after rising as much as 130 points earlier in the day. The

Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 11.58, or 1.1 percent, to 1,114.05, while the Nasdaq composite index rose 25.97, or 1.2 percent, at 2,237.66.

Bond prices sank as investors abandoned the safety of government debt in favor of stocks.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note, which moves opposite its price, climbed to 3.69 percent from 3.54 percent late Friday.

The dollar rose against other major currencies, making commodities more expensive for foreign buyers. Light, sweet crude for February delivery fell 70 cents to settle at \$73.72 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Gold also fell.

Monday's surge in stocks helped lift the Dow into positive territory for the month, giving it a 0.7 percent gain. Many analysts believe stocks should finish out the year strong after several weeks of listless trading.

Investors have been putting the brakes on stock buying since November, stepping back from the market following a historic rally over the past nine months. At the same time, prospects of an interest rate



FILE - In this photo made Thursday, Dec. 17, 2009, Traders James Dresch, left, Michael Raio, center, and Fred Demarco confer on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

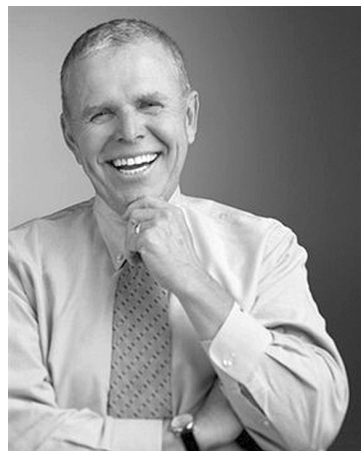
(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

hike and a potential rebound in the dollar have dogged investors who spent the year taking advantage of low rates to borrow cheaply and invest in stocks and commodities. Historically, December is the best single month for stocks, with the S&P 500 index averaging a 1.6 percent gain. So long as economic and corporate news continues to be encouraging, analysts expect the market to keep its momentum going into the new year.

Among the standout stocks,

Chattem surged more than 33 percent, adding \$23.16 to \$93.14 after Sanofi-Aventis offered \$93.50 a share for the company. Chattem, which is traded on the Nasdaq, helped lift that index to an intraday high for the year.

Alcoa shares shot up 7.9 percent after the announcement of the Saudi deal and Morgan Stanley's upgrade of the stock based on a forecast of higher aluminum prices. Shares jumped \$1.15 to \$15.73, after earlier hitting a 14-month high of \$15.98. □



In this photo released by Heritage Bank, Stan Wilmoth, President of Heritage Bank of Nevada, is shown. Wilmoth credits his grandfather, a Protestant minister, with giving him 'moral fiber.'

(AP Photo/Heritage Bank of Nevada)

Banks getting bum rap on not lending enough?

By BERNARD CONDON
and STEVENSON JACOBS,
AP Business Writers

NEW YORK – Unlike big-city bankers, Stan Wilmoth didn't make lots of dumb loans during the boom. After the crash, he accepted not a dime of taxpayer money for his bank. His salary? "Substantially less" than the \$1 million the former head of Merrill Lynch spent remodeling his office, he says. He credits his grandfather, a Protestant minister, with giving him "moral fiber." But judging from the rhetoric coming out of the Obama administration, Wilmoth, the folksy 58-year-old president of Heritage Bank of Reno, Nev., should be scorned, not praised. His sin? He's shirking his patriotic duty by not lending enough money to his community. It's

easy to hate bankers right now, but is it possible that on the issue of lending they're getting a bum rap? After all, it's not just "fat cats" with multimillion-dollar bonuses who aren't lending much money. It's small fry like Wilmoth, too. His bank, owned by 352 Nevada families, has just \$393 million in assets versus \$2.3 trillion at Bank of America. Everybody agrees lending is down in the past year, despite a government infusion of hundreds of billions of dollars to prop up banks, unfreeze the credit market and get institutions to start making loans again. As in past recessions, though, the drop seems to reflect more a lack of demand from would-be borrowers than any stinginess on the part of bankers.

"We really haven't changed our lending

criteria in the last five years," Wilmoth says. "The only thing that has changed is the number of qualified borrowers."

Critics complain banks are using deposits to buy securities, like government bonds, instead of lending the money to consumers and small businesses.

But bankers and analysts say the industry is just following a familiar, and healthy, playbook on how to manage its finances early in a recovery when the risk of borrowers defaulting is still high. It's a playbook pretty much written by the Federal Reserve: Borrow for themselves at near-zero short-term interest rates set by the central bank to buy higher-yielding securities, such as Treasuries, while waiting for creditworthy borrowers to return. □

SPORTS

Aruba TODAY

NASCAR's Johnson wins male athlete of the year

By JENNA FRYER

AP Auto Racing Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — There was little recognition outside the racing world when Jimmie Johnson won his first NASCAR championship. Same with his second, and again with his third.

But four straight championships? That's a different story.

Johnson, the first driver in NASCAR history to win four consecutive titles, earned mainstream recognition Monday when he was honored as the Male Athlete of the Year by members of The Associated Press.

Johnson received 42 votes from editors at U.S. newspapers which are members of the AP. Tennis star Roger Federer (30 votes) and Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt (29) were the only other athletes with totals in the double-digits.



This is a Nov. 15, 2009, file photo showing Jimmie Johnson celebrating in Victory Lane after winning the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series' Checker O'Reilly Auto Parts 500 race at Phoenix International Raceway in Avondale, Ariz. Johnson has been picked as the Male Athlete of the Year by members of The Associated Press, Monday Dec. 21, 2009.

Although Tiger Woods was named Athlete of the Decade, the golfer received only nine votes for Athlete of the Year. He was tied with NBA star Kobe Bryant and slugger Albert Pujols in fourth place. Woods, who was ranked No. 1 in his sport but failed to win one of golf's majors this season, was never a top contender — even before the sex scandal that unraveled his personal life following a Nov. 27 traffic accident.

For Johnson, the first race car driver to be named the AP's Athlete of the Year in its 78-year history, the award is the validation he's been waiting for since he began his historic run in 2006.

"We'd been wondering the last few years, 'When is this going to hit?'" he said.

"It seems like the answer is now.

Associated Press

Continued on Page 15



Kansas guard Tyshawn Taylor, right, and Michigan guard Stu Douglass battle for the ball during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game Saturday, Dec. 19, 2009, in Lawrence, Kan.

Associated Press

By JIM O'CONNELL

AP Basketball Writer

Kansas will be spending at least one more week atop The Associated Press' college basketball poll, a spot it has held all season.

Another Big 12 team from

that state jumped to territory it hasn't been in over 25 years.

Kansas State moved up to No. 12 on Monday, its highest ranking since the Wildcats were ninth in the final poll of 1972-73.

The Jayhawks (10-0), who

Kansas' lead trimmed in AP men's basketball poll

beat Michigan 75-64 in their only game last week, saw their lead over Texas trimmed a bit. They received 55 first-place votes from the 65-member national media panel, six less than it had a week earlier. Those votes all went to Texas (10-0), which beat No. 10 North Carolina 103-90 on Saturday, and was No. 1 on seven ballots.

Kentucky (11-0) had one first-place vote and was third, followed by Purdue (10-0) and Syracuse (11-0), which was No. 1 on two ballots.

West Virginia, Duke and Villanova remained sixth through eighth, while Michigan State moved up three places to ninth and North Carolina remained 10th.

Connecticut moved up three

spots to 11th and was followed by Kansas State, New Mexico, Georgetown, Mississippi, Tennessee, Ohio State, Florida, Texas A&M and Butler.

Temple is making its first appearance in the poll since November 2001, and was followed by Washington, Texas Tech, Clemson and Gonzaga.

Kansas State (10-1) beat Alabama 87-74 last week to run its winning streak to seven since an 86-74 loss to Mississippi in the semifinals of the Puerto Rico Tip-Off. The Wildcats are ranked No. 1 in this week's RPI ratings.

Temple (9-2) made its move into the rankings after handing two Big East teams their first losses of the season. The Owls followed their win over

Villanova with a 71-65 victory at Seton Hall on Saturday.

Clemson (10-2) moved back into the rankings after falling out for two weeks. The Tigers have won four straight since a 76-74 loss to Illinois.

Georgia Tech (8-2) fell out from 22nd after losing its Atlantic Coast Conference opener to Florida State 66-59 in overtime on Sunday. Cincinnati (7-3) moved into the poll at No. 19 two weeks ago, then fell out from 25th this week following consecutive losses to Xavier and UAB.

Two of this week's three games between ranked teams are on Tuesday, when Michigan State visits Texas and Texas A&M is at Washington. Mississippi visits West Virginia on Wednesday. □

APNewsBreak: Yanks hit with \$25.7M luxury tax

By RONALD BLUM

AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK — Winning came with a hefty price for the New York Yankees. The World Series champions were hit with a luxury tax of nearly \$25.69 million Monday, according to information received by clubs and obtained by The Associated Press.

New York is the only team to pay a tax for this season and has crossed the threshold in all seven years since the tax started. According to the collective bargaining agreement, the Yankees must send a check to the commissioner's office by Jan. 31.

The Yankees have been billed \$174 million of the tax's \$190 million total since 2003. The only other teams to pay have been Boston (\$13.9 million for 2004-7), Detroit (\$1.3 million for 2008) and the Los Angeles Angels (\$927,059 for 2004).

At least the Yankees got value for their spending, winning the World Series for the first time since 2000 after adding high-priced free agents CC Sabathia, A.J. Burnett and Mark Teixeira. And the Yankees did lower their tax bill from \$26.86 million last year, when their streak of consecutive playoff appearances ended at 13.

New York's payroll was \$226.2 million for the purpose

of the luxury tax and the Yankees pay at a 40 percent rate for the amount over \$162 million. To compute the payroll, Major League Baseball uses the average annual values of contracts for players on 40-man rosters and adds benefits.

The Yankees' regular payroll — using 2009 salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses — finished at \$220 million. That was a drop of \$2.5 million from 2008 but more than \$77.8 million higher than any other team — a gap larger than the payrolls of the bottom 11 clubs.

The New York Mets were second at \$142.2 million, followed by the equally disappointing Chicago Cubs (\$141.6 million).

Boston (\$140.5 million) was next, followed by Detroit (\$139.4 million) and NL champion Philadelphia (\$138.3 million), a big increase from the \$112.7 million the Phillies spent when they won the World Series in 2008.

Only two teams outside the top 11 by payroll made the postseason: Colorado (16th at \$84.5 million) and Minnesota (23rd at \$73.1 million).

Florida again was last in the majors, even though the Marlins raised their payroll by \$10.5 million to \$37.5 million. San Diego dropped from 23rd at \$71.2 million to 29th at \$43.2 million.



New York Yankees C.C. Sabathia, left, Alex Rodriguez, second from left, Curtis Granderson, second from right, and manager Joe Girardi attend a press conference at Yankee Stadium in New York, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2009, where Granderson was introduced as the newest Yankees player.

Associated Press

Half the 30 teams cut payroll from 2008. In addition to the Padres, Seattle dropped from \$120.5 million to \$102.3 million, Toronto fell from \$98.3 million to \$84.1 million and Cincinnati sliced from \$82.9 million to \$72.7 million. Besides the Phillies, other teams with big increases were Tampa Bay (\$51.0 million to \$71.2 million), San Francisco (\$82.1 million to \$95.2 million), Kansas

City (\$69.2 million to \$81.9 million), the Cubs (\$130.5 million to \$141.6 million) and Washington (\$59.7 million to \$69.3 million).

Overall payroll rose 1.2 percent to \$2.91 billion from \$2.88 billion, down from a 6.3 percent increase the previous year. Payroll figures are for 40-man rosters and include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses, earned incentive bonuses, non-cash

compensation, buyouts of unexercised options and cash transactions, such as money included in trades. In some cases, parts of salaries that are deferred are discounted to reflect present-day values.

The commissioner's office computed the average salary at \$2,882,336. The players' association, which uses slightly different methods of calculation, had its average at \$2,996,106. □

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FC Barcelona's Messi wins World Player of the Year



Soccer player Marta, left, from Brazil and Lionel Messi, right, from Argentina pose with their trophies after both were named FIFA World Player of the Year during the FIFA World Player Gala 2009 at the Kongresshaus in Zurich, Switzerland, Monday, Dec. 21, 2009.

Associated Press

BRADLEY S. KLAPPER
Associated Press Writer

ZURICH (AP) — Lionel Messi claimed the World Player of the Year award on Monday to nearly complete his collection

of football's greatest honors. Messi tacked on the prestigious award to his growing list of accolades at a FIFA gala ceremony in Zurich, easily outdistancing the last two

winners — Cristiano Ronaldo and Kaka — along with his Barcelona teammates Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta in voting among national team captains and coaches.

It caps a perfect year for the winger, who won an unprecedented treble of titles with Barcelona — the Spanish league and cup, and the Champions League — and received the Ballon D'Or as the best player in Europe. He also sealed Barcelona's first Club World Cup on Saturday with an extra-time goal to beat Estudiantes 2-1.

All that eludes the 22-year-old Argentine now is a World Cup title. "It is beautiful to achieve a year that cannot possibly be improved," Messi said through a translator. He called the award "the icing on the cake."

Messi, who was runner-up the last two years, received 1,047 points in voting. Ronaldo

was second with 352 points, followed by Xavi with 196 points.

Messi scored 38 goals in 51 matches in all competitions during 2008-2009 season, and has continued with 15 goals in 22 games this campaign as Barcelona have surged to the top of La Liga and back to the Champions League knockout phase.

But his form with Argentina has been less spectacular.

The South American giants only stumbled into the World Cup after late winners in the final qualifying matches against Peru and Uruguay, with Messi in particular appearing confused and uninspired since Diego Maradona took over as coach last year.

Maradona has labeled Messi his "successor" on the field, and Messi has already surpassed the former great in terms of successes at club level. But his

only international triumph was an Olympic gold medal in 2006, and he will have to play much better for his country to lead Argentina to a third World Cup — and its first since Maradona inspired victory in 1986.

Asked about his play with Argentina, Messi said he didn't know why he has been unable to recapture his club form with his country. "Argentina had a hard time in the qualifying round," he conceded. "But the World Cup is something different. I just hope the team and I can play better."

The women's award went to Brazil's Marta for the fourth year in a row. The 23-year-old playmaker beat teammate Cristiane, Kelly Smith of England, and Germans Birgit Prinz and Inka Grings.

"I'm really surprised," Marta said.

The late England player and manager Bobby Robson received FIFA's fair play award, while the presidential award for contributions to football and society went to Jordan's Queen Rania.

The world football body also announced its first World XI men's team — which included six players from the Spanish league and five from the Premier League.

Real Madrid's Iker Casillas was chosen as goalkeeper, with Manchester United's Nemanja Vidic and Patrice Evra joining Chelsea's John Terry and Barcelona's Dani Alves in defense. Xavi, Iniesta and Liverpool's Steven Gerrard were picked as midfielders, with Messi, Ronaldo and Liverpool striker Fernando Torres in attack. □

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ATHLETE'S OF YEAR
Continued from Page 12

The wave is finally peaking, and we don't know where it's going to take us. The fourth straight title takes it out of our sport and makes it a point of discussion — like, 'Wow, a race car driver won this thing.'"

The 34-year-old Californian again schooled the competition, winning four of his seven races this season when the Chase for the Sprint Cup championship began in September. Two-time champion Tony Stewart dominated the "regular season," but it was Johnson and his No. 48 Hendrick Motorsports team that turned it up when the stakes were highest.

In the 10 Chase races, Johnson finished outside the top-10 only once: when he wrecked at Texas with Sam Hornish Jr. three laps into the eighth race. The crash proved Johnson's mettle, as he sat inside his car, helmet on, for more than an hour as crew chief Chad Knaus led a total rebuild of his Chevrolet so that Johnson could return to the track.

Although the 38th-place finish decimated his cozy lead in the standings, he shrugged off any potential challenge by rolling into Phoenix the next week and leading 238 of the 312 laps en route to a victory that turned the season finale into a low-key Sunday drive for Johnson.

"I'm pretty sure that dude's Superman," said teammate Mark Martin, who finished second in the standings, 141

points behind Johnson.

The march into the record books has attracted attention for Johnson far beyond NASCAR's insulated garage. HBO Sports' award-winning "24/7" program has tabbed Johnson for a four-episode series that will chronicle his preparation for the 2010 season-opening Daytona 500. And he received widespread attention earlier this month when he donated \$922,000 in educational grants to 26 schools in California, North Carolina and Oklahoma.

Now comes the AP honor, which Johnson said reinforces what he's always believed — that even though he's a race car driver, he's "100 percent" an athlete.

"I've looked at other sports, particularly baseball, and I've seen plenty of out-of-shape, fat players," said Johnson, who counts among his close friends former NFL player Jason Sehorn, and MLB players Brian and Marcus Giles.

"So to anyone who wants to go head-to-head with me in athletic ability, let's go. I talked a lot with Jason Sehorn about this, and I don't know how exactly you measure athletic ability, but I know my 5-mile run time will destroy most NFL players."

As Johnson boasted of his personal best — 34 minutes, 55 seconds — his wife, Chandra, yelled "Overachiever!" in the background. It's a bit of a joke between the two since Johnson gave a two-year commitment to a New York City-based

trainer he calls "the Chad Knaus of the body."

His focus can be fanatical, but Johnson still finds time to maintain his work hard/play hard attitude — and proved it with a raucous South Beach celebration after the season-finale. The bash left him admittedly weary during the next few days, during a round of media appearances. And when the New York City mayor's office designated a "Jimmie Johnson Day" earlier this month, the champion suggested "everyone should have the day off and go have margaritas."

It's a balance between play and work that he's mastered, and firmly believes he can ride to a fifth title. Johnson recently signed a five-year



This is an Oct. 11, 2009, file photo showing Jimmie Johnson during the NASCAR Sprint Series Pepsi 500 at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif. Johnson has been picked as the Male Athlete of the Year by members of The Associated Press, Monday Dec. 21, 2009.

Associated Press

deal to drive for Hendrick over the next several years. through 2015, and Knaus "The cool thing," has predicted the team can Johnson said, "is keep up its rate of success we're not done yet." □

NYRA: Cash flow crunch threatens Belmont Stakes

MICHAEL GORMLEY
Associated Press Writer

ALBANY, New York (AP) — The New York Racing Association said Monday it's facing a cash crunch that could threaten the Belmont Stakes and thoroughbred horse racing's Triple Crown because the state government still hasn't approved video slot machines at the Aqueduct racetrack. NYRA President Charlie Hayward said that unless state lawmakers agree to allow video slots soon at Aqueduct, the NYRA may need another \$30 million bailout from the state to save the racing season at Belmont, which includes the final leg of the Triple Crown. Such threats have been made before by the private group, which runs thoroughbred racing and state tracks under a franchise. But Hayward insisted

the NYRA is down to about \$11 million in cash, \$4 million short of projections, because of a debt owed by the New York City Off-Track Betting Corp., which also has been perennially troubled. "We think we're going to burn through that \$11 million sometime in May or June," Hayward told The Associated Press. He said if the NYRA can't be assured of a steady flow of cash from video slots at Aqueduct or from the state, which is also trying to address deficits, then the racing group wouldn't open the Belmont track on Long Island this spring because of seasonal commitments that would have to be made to horse owners. Legislative leaders and Gov. David Paterson, however, have been unable to agree on a vendor, who would have to pay \$200 million up front to the state. □



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SPORTS

Aruba TODAY

Messy playoff picture with 6 AFC teams at 7-7



Tennessee Titans place kicker Rob Bironas (2) celebrates with holder Brett Kern (6) after Bironas kicked a 46-yard field goal in overtime to beat the Miami Dolphins 27-24 in an NFL football game on Sunday, Dec. 20, 2009, in Nashville, Tenn.

Associated Press



This is a Dec. 30, 2008, file photo showing Seattle Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren during a news conference at the team headquarters in Renton, Wash. The Super Bowl-winning coach is scheduled to appear on Seattle's KJR radio on Friday, Dec. 18, 2009, when he may announce his future plans.

Associated Press

TOM WITHERS

AP Sports Writer

BEREA, Ohio (AP) — Super Bowl-winning coach Mike

By **BARRY WILNER**

AP Football Writer

These playoff races are oh, so easy to decipher, aren't they? No ties at the top of divisions and two clear-cut wild-card teams in each conference.

Real easy — except for this: There are two more weeks on the schedule and enough teams on the playoff fringe to create a wild scramble for the remaining berths.

Here's what we do know: San Diego, Indianapolis, New Orleans, Minnesota and Arizona are division champions. The Colts and Saints have clinched first-round byes, and the Chargers are on the verge of doing so. Titans

The Eagles own at least a wild-card spot, and if they beat Denver on Sunday and Dallas loses to Washington, the NFC East is Philadelphia's.

Mike Holmgren to join Browns as team president

Holmgren accepted a job to become the Cleveland Browns team president on Monday, joining a club needing a major makeover after a decade of losing.

Browns owner Randy Lerner said current president Mike Keenan will switch to the role of chief financial officer.

"We will spend the rest of the week finalizing the details of the agreement and will make a formal announcement next week," Lerner said in a statement Monday.

Holmgren is coming to Cleveland strictly in an executive role. On his radio show last week, Holmgren indicated his job offer with the Browns could include a return to the sideline. But Holmgren's duties likely will

focus on personnel decisions, and there's a chance he may bring in a general manager to help him.

It's still not known what effect Holmgren's hiring will have on first-year Cleveland coach Eric Mangini, who improved to 3-11 on Sunday following a 41-34 victory over the Kansas City Chiefs.

Mangini may have strengthened his chances of staying for at least another year after leading the Browns to consecutive wins.

Holmgren, though, could choose to replace Mangini with his own coach to try and turn around the Browns, who have lost at least 10 games in six of the past seven seasons and made the AFC playoffs just once since 1999. □

Cincinnati needs a win Sunday against Kansas City to clinch the AFC North. New England gets the AFC East by beating Jacksonville. Both of those division leaders also can clinch if their nearest pursuers, Baltimore in the North and Miami in the East, fall Sunday.

Through 14 games, the wild-card holders are Dallas and Green Bay in the NFC, with no tiebreakers necessary. In the AFC, it's Baltimore and Denver, the only 8-6 teams in the conference. There are several scenarios through which the Ravens, Broncos, Cowboys and Packers could grab those wild cards this weekend.

So now let's muddle things. A lot. Not in the NFC, where only the New York Giants also remain viable. But in the AFC, there's potential for all six 7-7 clubs to get in, and one of them — Miami — could still win its division.

"We're still in this race," Dolphins coach Tony Sparano said. "The best chance we have is we have to win two games. We still have a pulse. We'll prepare that way." Heading into Week 15, Jacksonville owns the No. 7 seed, for whatever that's worth considering the Jaguars must go to New England. The Patriots need a win to considerably ease their load on the final weekend — and they still could be the second seed in the AFC. The Jaguars finish at Cleveland.

Jacksonville gets that edge, which could be significant at season's end, because the NFL first uses division tiebreakers to clarify the wild-card competition. The

Jaguars have a better head-to-head record with Houston and Tennessee, both also 7-7. Miami swept the Jets and has that division edge.

Then, with Jacksonville, Pittsburgh and Miami remaining among the 7-7 teams, the Jags have the best conference mark.

In order, the other rankings for the 7-7 clubs are Miami, New York, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and Houston. The Jets and Titans have particularly difficult matchups this weekend: New York is at undefeated Indianapolis on Sunday, while Tennessee hosts San Diego on Christmas night.

"We're still alive, as crazy as it is to say," Jets safety Jim Leonhard said. "We're still in this. We go out and play well, you never know what could happen."

Of course, everything could get scrambled in a week, particularly if Baltimore loses at Pittsburgh and Denver falls at Philadelphia.

"Still alive," said Steelers tackle Max Starks. "You can't kill us until we're dead."

Conceivably, the AFC could have seven 8-7 teams competing for the two wild-card slots heading into the final weekend. The Dolphins host the Texans, so someone won't get to eight wins on Sunday.

"Even though things haven't gone how we want them to go, we still can control the next two weeks," Dolphins linebacker Reggie Torbor said. "We can go out and win those games and whatever happens from there we can't control, so there's no need in worrying about it." □



On Top Of The News

Email: news@arubatoday.com

Tuesday, December 22, 2009

The Discerning Diner:
**House of Japan
launches
great menu**



PALM BEACH - Located within the stylish new South Beach Mall, the House of Japan not only offers chic surroundings and an intimate ambiance, it also sports the most unique sushi selection on the island.

Page B3

Early, but good
**Christmas
breakfast for
Aruba Wine
And Diners**



ORANJESTAD - Christmas came early last Monday morning for the staffers of Aruba Wine And Dine, one of the largest employers on the island. At 7.15 am, sleepy and yawning employees were seated at Café the Plaza, where owners Hans Nooter and Harry Koeman treated them to a fabulous breakfast, speeches and a gift.

Page B4

AirTran Adds Flights To Aruba



ORANJESTAD — AirTran Airways has added new weekly service between Atlanta and the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba.

The discount carrier says the weekly nonstop route began Saturday between Atlanta and the tourism-dependent island off Venezuela's coast.

More on Page B8

Marking Finale of Celebrations Honoring 100,000 Restaurant Visitors

Ruth's Chris Announces Winner of 100,000 Marriott Rewards Points



PALM BEACH — On Saturday December 19th a raffle took place, drawing the big winner of 100,000 Marriott Rewards Points. The raffle marked the end of a 4 week campaign at Ruth's Chris Steak House celebrating the 100,000th visitor to the popular steakhouse in Aruba. Marriott's Director of Rooms Operations Leslie Pea was asked to draw the winning ticket from a well-filled raffle drum in the presence of the restaurant's manager and staff. The lucky winner was Steve Cox, a Marriott guest staying at Tradewinds Club, the luxurious hotel within a hotel occupying the entire top floor of the Resort.

Continued on Page B6

Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba love Mr. Jazz



PALM BEACH – Sister Newspapers Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba celebrated in style over the weekend. The mother company, Caribbean Speed Printing N.V. hosted the annual holiday dinner at Mr. Jazz in the Paseo Herencia

Mall. CSP is the mother company of Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba and they all celebrated together. Publisher John Chemaly Jr. together with CSP General Manager Grace Mary Maduro were fabulous hosts for the special

event for the management and staff of both publications. The event wouldn't have been so exciting without the great music from C-Zar Olarte and The Untouchables who kept the dance floor exciting. Aruba Today sends Holiday wishes to sister company Bon Dia Aruba and congratulates them for this holiday season.





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The Discerning Diner:

House of Japan launches great menu



PALM BEACH - Located within the stylish new South Beach Mall, the House of Japan not only offers chic surroundings and an intimate ambiance, it also sports the most unique sushi selection on the island. House of Japan has brought in master sushi chef Kasuki Tsuchiya to create a selection of specialized dishes



just for them, and they provide a fresh and memorable dining experience for even the most jaded aficionados of sushi. Raised in the large Japanese community of Latin American, Chef Kasuki has incorporated many of the elements of regional cooking for his distinctive creations.

The Discerning Diner visited the House of Japan and met Chef Kasuki and Mylene, whose deft hands quickly

produce a variety of sushi and other fresh Japanese delights. Many will remember Mylene from Sakura in Oranjestad, and the sushi stand at La Cabana. Admitting that "sushi is my passion," Mylene has found a new home at House of Japan, her inborn artistry evident with each beautiful platter.

Most great cuisines take into consideration not only flavor, but presenting a feast

for all the senses; sight and smell create anticipation before our taste buds and tummy are actually rewarded. Sushi is the pinnacle of food as art; a beautifully arranged mélange of color and design to delight the eyes, right down to the vibrant salad that garners the serving platter.

Our team of taste testers tried a number of house specialties beginning with Kushi Katsu, and two sushi rolls devised particularly for House of Japan; the South Beach Roll and the Ivanka Roll. Sorely tempted by the Oranjestad Roll and the Neptune Salad,

we were just too full to manage these equally appealing dishes as well. Our choices proved more than ample for two and provided a remarkable experience for the senses.

"The sushi we are making here is like none other seen on Aruba," expressed Mylene regarding working with Chef Kasuki, "it is so exciting to be trying these new dishes, they are so untraditional and I find the old standards pale in comparison. We have everyone's favorites, and can make anything they ask for, but we are sure they will love what we have created." □



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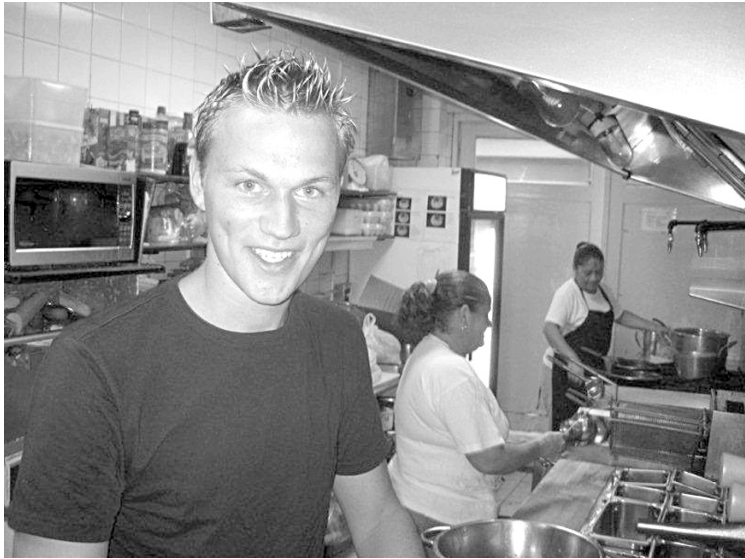
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Early, but good

Christmas breakfast for Aruba Wine And Diners



ORANJESTAD - Christmas came early last Monday morning for the staffers of Aruba Wine And Dine, one of the largest employers on the island. At 7.15 am, sleepy and yawning employees were seated at Café the Plaza, where owners Hans Nooter and Harry Koeman treated them to a fabulous breakfast, speeches and a gift.

The Christmas tree twinkled, as the staffers ate scrambled eggs and sandwiches with cold cuts and cheese and drank freshly squeezed orange juice. Hans and Harry thanked their employees for their hard work in the past year with this breakfast and a cheque for everyone. With such a breakfast in their bellies they can tackle the busy Christmas Season! □



Dream about a White Christmas at CILO City Lounge on Saturday



with snowfall. But you can dream... And that is what you can do at CILO City Lounge on Saturday, December 26, when the restaurant is transformed into a white-and-silver wonderland to create the atmosphere of a White Christmas.

Themed after Bing Crosby's world famous song, 'I'm dreaming of a White Christmas', CILO City Lounge in the Renaissance Marketplace is the place to dream, especially when the band Lotus is playing classics and Christmas songs.

Dreaming starts at 10 pm and goes on until 3.

The dress code for the evening is 'casual chic', so wear whatever looks great on you. See you there! □



ORANJESTAD - Although many people are greatly enjoying their White Christmases around the world, Aruba is not blessed

At Café the Plaza

Santa Claus gives a gift to quiz master



ORANJESTAD - Quiz master Evert Bongers and his lovely assistant Petra received a gift from Café the Plaza last week for their fantastic work during the 8-week Quiz Night Series. More and more teams are playing in the popular Tuesday night series in the Renaissance Marketplace.

At the finale evening there were more than 60 people trying to answer the difficult questions! Santa's assistant Sarina Liptiay, new intern at Aruba Wine And Dine surprised quiz master Evert and Petra. She announced that the new series will start on January 5. □



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Ruth's Chris Announces Winner of 100,000 Marriott Rewards Points

Continued from Page B1

He receives 100,000 Marriott Rewards Points that will be deposited to his Rewards account.

During one month all guests of Ruth's Chris Steak House were invited to fill out coupons that gave them the chance to win 100,000 Marriott Rewards Points. The campaign was a big hit right from the start and drew hundreds of participants. Other celebrations included the festive honoring of Maria and Giff Andrew who were the actual 100,000th customers enjoying dinner at Ruth's Chris Steak House in Aruba on December 9th. There were treated to a complimentary dinner in the company of their best friends from New York.

On December 12th a VIP Reception took place where management and staff of Ruth's Chris, accompanied by executives of Marriott personally thanked the most loyal visitors to the steakhouse for their support over the past 22 months. Amongst the invitees were Marriott guests and owners as well as locals, American and Canadian citizens who own a second home in Aruba.

Now that the celebrations came to an end with the drawing of the Rewards Points winner, the famed steakhouse is rapidly preparing for yet



more festivities, namely the Holidays. A few seats are left during this week, however on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Years Eve, Ruth's Chris is sold out. Walk-ins and people who want to try their luck to see if there are any cancelations that might free up a table, are strongly suggested to consult the hostess on the same day they want to join for dinner, starting at 1 PM by calling 520 6600 or visiting the hostess stand inside the steakhouse, located in the Marriott Lobby.

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	matinee: 12.00	2.45			
R	NINJA ASSASSIN	daily: 7.00	9.15	late show: 11.45	
	matinee:				
PG	OLD DOGS	daily: 4.15	6.15	8.15	10.15
	matinee: 12.15	2.15	late show: 12.15		
PG-13	2012	daily: 4.45	8.00	late show: 11.15	
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PG-13	THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON	daily: 6.00	9.00	late show: 11.45	
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	matinee: 1.30				
PG-13	DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE MORGANS?	daily: 6.45	9.00	late show: 11.15	NEW
	matinee:				
PG-13	THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON	daily: 5.45	8.45	late show: 11.45	
	matinee: 12.00	3.00			
G	THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG	daily: 4.45		late show:	
	matinee: 12.15	2.30			
PG-13	2012	daily: 5.00	8.15	late show: 11.30	
	matinee: 1.45				
R	KOMT EEN VROUW BIJ DE DOKTER	daily: 7.00	9.15	late show: 11.30	
	matinee:				
PG-13	EVERYBODY'S FINE	daily: 4.30		late show:	
	matinee: 12.00	2.15			
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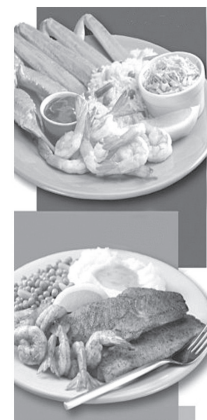
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AirTran Adds Flights To Aruba



ORANJESTAD — AirTran Airways has added new weekly service between Atlanta and the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba. The discount carrier says the weekly nonstop route began Saturday between Atlanta and the tourism-dependent island off Venezuela's coast.

Otmar Oduber is Aruba's minister of tourism, transportation and labor. He says the new direct service will be a boon for the people of Aruba, "for whom tourism is so important."

Florida-based AirTran also announced Saturday that it plans to introduce weekly nonstop flights between Orlando and Aruba on Jan. 9.

Aruba is the fifth announced Caribbean destination for AirTran, which also flies to Cancun and San Juan and will begin service to Montego Bay on Feb. 11.

The airline is a unit of Orlando, Florida-based AirTran Holdings Inc and plans to serve the latter destinations with nonstops from Atlanta, Baltimore/Washington, and Orlando.

Catch your own dinner with Driftwood!

Motto at Driftwood Restaurant: "From the pier to your plate!"

ORANJESTAD - The downtown marina is home of **Driftwood Fishing Charters**, the successful fishermen of the established seafood restaurant **Driftwood** in Oranjestad.

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"fresh seafood" really mean. What Herby catches will be served in his restaurant on

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Catch your own dinner

12 noon and from 1pm to 5pm. A charter includes: captain, mate, all fishing equipment, bait, sodas and bottled water. On a full day charter sandwiches and snacks are also included. You can call Herby directly at (297) 592 4040 or go to www.driftwoodaruba.com.

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Driftwood Restaurant

This authentic Aruban seafood restaurant is located in characteristic downtown Oranjestad. Their extended

menu has been jubled by many. Driftwood offers daily specials, as well as a delicious 3-course menu for just \$24.

Driftwood Restaurant

Authentic Aruban Seafood Restaurant

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www.driftwoodaruba.com

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Experience Papillon's gripping story!

Introducing a catching special for the early Birds

Papillon at The Village, across from the Radisson Resort, is a most unusual restaurant: having been named after Henri Charrière, France's most notorious escaped convict, its design is 'prison-style' chic. Cozy, elegant yet casual, it offers the best possible quality products, superb French wines and European seasonal delicacies, like mussels, white asparagus and game. The restaurant is best-known for its French-Caribbean cuisine, its excellent service and quest for perfection. The mellow, French music in the background will surely increase your appetite!

Celebrating its first successful year in business at The Village, Papillon has introduced its Early Bird dinner. Popular from the start, this is a three-course, classy dinner at a most affordable price. Get a taste of Papillon's cuisine from 5.00 until 7.00 pm and come back again and again to enjoy the restaurant's regular menu. Papillon's great staffers are very pleased to advise you which wine will enhance your dinner.

Henri Charrière, called 'Papillon' because of the butterfly tattoo on his chest, would never have thought that he would be the inspiration for this unique restaurant on Aruba. He has captured the imagination

of millions when he wrote the gripping, shocking story of his conviction, but now his nickname is a synonym for a superb evening out underneath the stars.

Bon appetite!

Opening hours

Papillon's opening hours are from 5 pm until midnight. The restaurant's daily specials will be explained by the staff. For reservations, please call 586 5400 or go to www.papillonaruba.com.

Papillon Restaurant is located in The Village, just across from the Radisson Resort.

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The Sunset Grille is Aruba's premier traditional steakhouse!



Palm Beach -- The Sunset Grille at the Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa needs no introduction. The award winning American steakhouse with its chic, cosmopolitan atmosphere headlines Prime Beef, the highest grade USDA -- only 2% of all beef is graded prime, required to age a minimum of 4 weeks. The restaurant also features Certified Angus Beef, specialty selected highly marbled USDA and premium never-frozen seafood. While steaks and chops make

up the heart of the menu, the resort's Executive Chef Hector Espinoza and restaurant Chef Johnny Farro innovated unparalleled appetizers and extraordinary desserts, which helped the Sunset Grille achieve AAA's elite four-diamond status -- a rare feat for steakhouses. Chef Farro is now the dedicated restaurant chef, delivering over 20 years of restaurant experience to the already legendary culinary team. When asked to suggest a

perfect dinner combination, Chef Farro does not hesitate and order the Chop House Martini Salad, with Romaine Lettuce, Hearts of Palm, Sliced Egg, Tomatoes, Blue Cheese, Bacon, Sweet Pepper and creamy Chopin Vodka dressing, served "Shaken not Stirred," the Lobster Bisque baked with a Crispy Pastry Crust and flavored with a touch of cognac, and the popular Rack of Lamb featuring Four Double Cut Chops, with Mint Pesto, Roasted Tomatoes and Onion Confit.



The latest restaurant's menu revision included the introduction of some interesting dishes such as Tuna Tataki, Sesame Rice Cracker crusted Tuna served rare with Thai Chili and Ginger; Roasted Loin Veal Chop, Apple Chutney, Maple Balsamic Glaze with a Garlic & Spinach Custard and Asia Style Salmon & Scallops, escorted by wakame salad and served over soba noodles. The Sunset Grille always endeavors to exceed guests' expectations by purchasing the very best products available and

preparing them in accordance with a combination of "tried and true" as well as cutting edge contemporary methods, Espinoza explains. Simply put, the Sunset Grille culinary team buys the best products, and cooks them the best way they know, refusing to cut corners, especially when it comes to buying, aging and cutting meat. No wonder the readers of Caribbean Travel & Life named it the top restaurant in the Caribbean. Open for dinner from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. every night, indoor and outdoor seating. □

Life's a Beach at the Juggling Fish

Palm Beach -- The Juggling Fish at Playa Linda Beach Resort is designed to stimulate your shopping instincts, as the beautiful store is hard to resist. What you'll find on the oceanfront boardwalk is absolutely gorgeous: hand picked gifts, souvenirs, beach

and resort wear, it's all on display a few steps from the water. The tastefully arranged store is signature Boston-born Jodi Tobman, also the owner of the brand-new Lazy Lizard, in the South Beach Centre. You will find a great selection of

kid gifts here. In fact an entire inner section is dedicated to gifts with a tropical appeal for babies and toddlers, among them whimsical plush stuffed iguanas, parrots and seahorses. Moreover, a bonanza of fridge magnets, hand-made silver jewelry, batik beach



wraps, throws and hats also awaits you. Gift hunters will be pleased with the array of scented candles and candleholders. The store offers convenient barefoot browsing possibilities and is located within a short walking distance from the Hyatt Regency and the Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort. The Juggling Fish at Playa Linda fits nicely into that resort's "Life's a Beach" philosophy. Open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday and on Sunday, when the rest of the island is at a standstill, the helpful staff at the Juggling Fish Playa

Linda beach Resort is eager to serve you with a smile from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m. Tel.: +297 586 4999. Email: orders@salamanderholdings.com □



Dutch police seek to explain young sailor's trip

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Her dream of becoming the youngest person to sail solo around the world shattered and under scrutiny over her quest, Dutch teenager Laura Dekker ran away from home — to the Caribbean 5,000 miles away.

Two days after she was reported missing, police managed to track the 14-year-old girl down on the island of St. Maarten.

Police and child care authorities were working Monday to uncover how exactly Laura got there and why she fled, as a family spokeswoman speculated that the pressure of a court battle over the attempt had gotten to her.

St. Maarten police spokesman Ricardo Henson said Dekker arrived on the island Thursday from Paris.

She flew out Monday dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. She was carrying several bags, a small suitcase and a guitar.

It remained unclear if she had any plans to use the island, half of which is part of the Netherlands Antilles, as a start point for a sailing voyage.

She made international headlines in August when a court temporarily blocked her bid to set sail alone around the world in her 26-foot (8-meter) yacht Guppy.

If Laura were to get permission to set off on the voyage and successfully complete it, she would break a record set this year by 17-year-old Mike Perham of Britain, who sailed 28,000 miles (45,000 kilometers) around the world in nine months.

A 16-year-old Australian girl, Jessica Watson, is currently trying to beat Perham's record.

Utrecht District Court ruled in October that Laura was too inexperienced for the marathon voyage. Judges sent her home to live with her divorced father and appointed a temporary guardian to ensure she did not set off on the voyage. They urged her to make better preparations and said they would reconsider her case in July.



Laura Dekker, right, listens to local authorities before boarding a flight at the Princess Juliana international airport on the Caribbean island of St. Maarten in the Netherlands Antilles, Monday, Dec. 21, 2009. Dekker, a fourteen-year-old Dutch girl who made headlines around the world earlier this year when she unsuccessfully went to court to be allowed to go on a single-handed round-the-world sailing voyage, was found by the police after she ran away from home in the Netherlands.

(AP Photo/Gromyko Wilson)

Laura was born on a boat in New Zealand while her parents were sailing around the world. She is widely acknowledged — even by the judges — to be an excellent sailor.

Her parents have since divorced and Laura lives with her father, who is seen as a driving force behind her sailing plan. Instead of calling authorities when she went missing, her father called her mother who in turn informed police on Friday. She was spotted and detained on St. Maarten on Sunday.

Laura's mother has remained largely out of the picture, but she has said she considered her daughter too young to make the round-the-world trip.

In recent weeks she had been feeling drained by the pressure, said family spokeswoman Mariska Woertman.

"For her it was a big disappointment that the judges wouldn't let her go," Woertman said. "For a child of 14 years old it's probably a bit difficult to grasp." She said Laura had "a gut feeling" the court would not let her set sail

next year either.

Laura was expected to arrive back in the Netherlands on a flight early Tuesday, police spokesman Bernhard Jens said. Police will then ask her how she managed to slip out of the country last week and whether anybody helped her.

"We have a number of questions for her," Jens said. "How did this happen? Why did you go? How did you go? Did you go with somebody else?" Her family has similar questions, Woertman told The Associated Press.

Having spoken briefly with her on Sunday, Woertman said she was doing well "under the circumstances."

Joost Lanshage of Bureau Youth Care, which appointed Laura's temporary court-ordered guardian said the court's ban on her trip had hit her hard.

"She had a dream and it fell apart — that round-the-world trip," he said. "In the end she collapsed under the weight of the attention that generated and the dream being shattered. She is looking for some order."

What happens after authorities have spoken to Laura and whether she will be allowed to remain living with her father has yet to be decided. A court spokesman said any decision was up to her temporary guardian but would have to be approved by judges.

Lanshage said his organization spoke to both Laura and her father last week before she fled, but declined to give details, citing privacy rules.

It is possible she could be taken into state care, said Richard Bakker, a spokesman for the government's Child Protection Agency.

Woertman would not speculate on her future or her ambitious travel plans.

"We hope we will be able to make things clear for her in her head and her heart," she said. "It has all been very emotional for her." □

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St. Maarten may take its concerns to the UN

PHILIPSBURG--St. Maarten cannot be vetted on its readiness to become a country if it does not have the tools and funds needed to set up its infrastructure. And if the Dutch and Central Government continue to be unfair, the island's case will be taken to the United Nations Decolonisation Council, Constitutional Affairs Commissioner William Marlin said Sunday.

A formal protest will not be signed as yet because the Dutch government has promised to give a complete inventory, in February, of ways it will assist St. Maarten in setting up its infrastructure, Marlin explained.

St. Maarten has been waging an uphill battle for almost ten years to get the status of country within the Dutch Kingdom, but has had to leap over many hurdles and break down lots of barriers as it inches ever so slowly towards its goal.

The vetting process is like an exam for St. Maarten. The island will have to prove that it not only had the right structure for the new responsibilities it will take over from the Central Government but also the physical structure. And it is with the physical set up that glitches occur.

The island does not have the manpower or financial resources to set up its entities because it is still a part of the Netherlands Antilles and has to contribute some NAf. 100 million annually to the coffers of the Central Government.

To bridge the gap between island territory and country, St. Maarten needs much assistance, Marlin said.

When the National Alliance (NA)/Heyliger coalition took office on June 8, there was a definite change in direction from the Democratic Party (DP) stance of "we are ready" to the NA/Heyliger stance of "we need assistance."

Marlin said this change in approach has caused some issues with the Central Government, but the result from the change was the agreement penned on June 24 to set up dependencies of Central Government departments in St. Maarten and the Dutch would give support where necessary.

However, to date, "very little has happened" which had promoted Marlin to say in Wednesday's Island Council meeting that government was looking into possible mediation to get its point of needing help across.

As it relates to the NAf. 265 million that is available for the transfer of Central Government tasks to St. Maarten and Curaçao, Marlin maintains that the island got a "bad deal" because funds are needed now in the transition stage and not after. □

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Presidente de Colombia urge a guerrilla a pronta entrega rehenes



El presidente de Colombia, Alvaro Uribe, pidió el lunes a las FARC liberar de inmediato a dos militares que ofrecieron entregar desde abril y dijo que el grupo guerrillero debe cumplir con su palabra. REUTERS/Ints Kalnins

BOGOTA (Reuters) - El presidente de Colombia, Alvaro Uribe, pidió el lunes a las FARC liberar de inmediato a dos militares que ofrecieron entregar desde abril y dijo que el grupo guerrillero debe cumplir con su palabra.

Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) anunciaron en abril la liberación del sargento Pablo Emilio Moncayo y del soldado Josué Daniel Calvo, así como la entrega de los restos del oficial de la Policía Nacional Julián Ernesto Guevara, muerto en cautiverio.

Pero el proceso no se concretó por la exigencia inicial de Uribe para que la guerrilla entregara en forma simultánea a los 24 rehenes que mantiene por motivos políticos y que busca

intercambiar por cientos de rebeldes presos.

“Estamos en mora de que los liberen, ustedes saben que el Gobierno ha atendido todas las exigencias y no los han liberado ¿Por que?, estamos en mora de que los liberen”, declaró Uribe a periodistas. El Gobierno colombiano denunció que con las entregas graduales la guerrilla buscaba ganar espacio político en la antesala de las elecciones del 2010 y limpiar su imagen ante el mundo.

Uribe cambió de posición y meses después autorizó a la senadora del Partido Liberal Piedad Córdoba, a la Iglesia Católica y a la Cruz Roja Internacional para conformar una misión humanitaria que reciba a los dos rehenes y los restos de Guevara.

Moncayo, secuestrado por las FARC hace 12 años, se convirtió en uno de los rehenes más antiguos del conflicto interno de más de 45 años

que se registra en Colombia y ganó protagonismo a nivel internacional por las caminatas de su padre, el profesor Gustavo Moncayo, para exigir su liberación.

La Iglesia Católica, el Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja, la senadora Córdoba, el Gobierno y la guerrilla trabajan en absoluta discreción para definir la logística que permita la entrega de los militares.

El Gobierno de Colombia aspira a que Brasil sea el país que facilite la logística para la entrega de dos militares secuestrados por las FARC y para la devolución de los restos del oficial Guevara.

Brasil cuenta con la experiencia después de que en febrero facilitó los helicópteros y las tripulaciones que recibieron en la selva a cuatro efectivos de las Fuerzas Militares y dos políticos que permanecieron secuestrados por años. □

Cuba: Copenhague fue “una farsa” de las potencias

LA HABANA (AP) - La Cumbre de Copenhague fue una “farsa” y “un paso atrás” ante la delicada situación climática global, pero evidenció que los países en desarrollo no aceptarán presiones de las potencias responsables de la contaminación, aseguró el canciller cubano Bruno Rodríguez.

“En Copenhague ni había ni hay acuerdo”, dijo Rodríguez el lunes durante una conferencia de prensa en la cual acusó al presidente estadounidense Barack Obama de mentir a la opinión pública mundial y comportarse como un “prepotente” tratando de imponer el documento final “cocinado” entre 27 potencias acorde a sus intereses. Según Rodríguez, un ciudadano estadounidense consume en promedio 25 barriles de petróleo al año contra un barril gastado por un latinoamericano, pero aún así la nación norteamericana se negó a firmar el protocolo de Kioto de 1997 que obliga a los países a disminuir paulatinamente sus emisiones.

Rodríguez dijo que Obama “no escuchó a nadie” en el proceso de negociaciones de la cumbre y luego se presentó con actitud “imperial” en Copenhague tratando --

en conjunto con sus socios de potencias europeas-- de imponer un acuerdo no vinculante que “acabara” con el de Kioto, pero “no lo logró”, agregó el canciller.

El jefe de la diplomacia cubana dijo que por los representantes de países en desarrollo, las multitudinarias manifestaciones ambientalistas y de las naciones insulares amenazadas de desaparecer con un aumento del nivel del mar jugaron un papel crucial en el desenlace de la cumbre.

Rodríguez relató la batalla diplomática que se suscitó en la capital danesa el fin de semana incluyó negociaciones a deshora, a puertas cerradas y hasta intentos de sobornos de países como Reino Unido a las naciones que rechazaban firmar.

Refirió que los países pequeños que rehusaban adherirse al documento fueron amenazados con que no recibirían ni un centavo de los fondos que las naciones desarrolladas destinarían para financiar un fondo para mitigar los desastres provocados por el cambio climático, lo cual el diplomático cubano consideró como un “chantaje vergonzoso”. □

Detienen a ex banquero venezolano en EEUU

CARACAS (AP) - El presidente Hugo Chávez anunció el lunes que el ex banquero venezolano Eligio Cedeño fue detenido en Estados Unidos, luego de su liberación hace 11 días en este país por una jueza después de pasar dos años recluso a la espera de sentencia.

Chávez dijo en una cadena de radio y televisión que Cedeño “está detenido” en Miami, Florida, porque estaba “tratando de ingresar ilegalmente a Estados Unidos”. Denunció que Cedeño “salió ilegalmente de Venezuela”, e indicó que espera que el gobierno de Estados Unidos proceda a regresar al país al ex presidente de los bancos Canarias y Bolívar.

Cedeño, quien fue detenido en febrero del 2007 por un caso de entrega irregular de dólares a una empresa de computación, fue liberado el 10 de diciembre por decisión de la jueza María Lourdes Afiuni, quien le otorgó libertad provisional mientras se le seguía juicio.

Afiuni fue detenida poco después de emitir la sentencia por solicitud de la Fiscalía General que la acusó de incurrir en actos de corrupción y asociación para delinquir. Chávez fustigó duramente a la jueza Afiuni y exigió para ella la pena máxima de 30 años de cárcel. Vicente Puppio, abogado de Cedeño, afirmó que la decisión de la jueza Afiuni fue “absolutamente legítima”, y aseguró la inocencia de su defendido. □

Colombia niega espionaje a Venezuela con aviones no tripulados

BOGOTÁ (Reuters) - Colombia negó el lunes actividades de espionaje a Venezuela con aviones no tripulados dotados con tecnología estadounidense como lo denunció el presidente Hugo Chávez, en medio de una crisis diplomática entre los dos países.

Chávez dijo el domingo durante su programa Aló Presidente que un pequeño avión no tripulado sobrevoló recientemente una guarnición militar en el estado Zulia y aseguró que se trató de una aeronave con tecnología de Estados Unidos.

“Colombia no tiene esas capacidades que se describen ahí”, dijo el ministro de Defensa, Gabriel Silva, en declaraciones a periodistas.

“De pronto fue que los soldados venezolanos confundieron el trineo de Papá Noel con un avión espía”, precisó el funcionario.

Silva admitió el fin de semana que Colombia enfrenta el riesgo de una agresión militar externa y reconoció que comenzó a preparar una estrategia de disuasión



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mínima para defender su soberanía, que podría afectar su lucha contra la guerrilla y el narcotráfico.

El ministro colombiano de Defensa señaló implícitamente a Venezuela como responsable del riesgo de agresión, pero Chávez le respondió y afirmó

que su país no tiene ningún plan militar contra Colombia.

Por su parte el comandante de las Fuerzas Militares, general Freddy Padilla, aseguró que los recursos tecnológicos con los que cuenta el país son usados para combatir la guerrilla y el

narcotráfico, y no para espiar a países vecinos.

La actual crisis con Venezuela comenzó en julio cuando Colombia anunció que firmaría un acuerdo con Washington que permite a militares de Estados Unidos usar siete bases en su territorio para

realizar operaciones contra el narcotráfico y el terrorismo.

La disputa diplomática de Bogotá y Caracas es considerada como la peor desde 1987 cuando los dos países, que comparten una frontera terrestre de 2.219 kilómetros, estuvieron al borde de una guerra después de que un barco de combate de Colombia fue interceptado por la Armada de Venezuela en una zona marítima bajo disputa limítrofe.

Chávez, el más fuerte crítico de Washington en la región, denunció la supuesta intención de Estados Unidos de instalar una plataforma desde Colombia para invadir su país.

Durante la disputa diplomática, que ha afectado el comercio binacional, se han registrado asesinatos de colombianos en territorio venezolano, acusaciones de espionaje, detenciones de efectivos de las fuerzas de seguridad de los dos países y la destrucción de puentes artesanales en la frontera binacional. □

Descubren plan para matar al jefe antidrogas dominicano

SANTO DOMINGO (AP) - Las autoridades dominicanas dijeron el lunes que descubrieron un plan para matar al presidente de la Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas, el mayor general Rolando Rosado Mateo, y a seis presos.

Los funcionarios no dieron más detalles, pero un comunicado de la agencia dijo que los prisioneros habían sido cambiados de cárceles como precaución. No estaba

claro si se había incrementado la seguridad de Mateo como resultado del hallazgo.

El presunto cerebro del complot era el presunto narcotraficante fugitivo Ramón del Rosario Puente, dijo la agencia. Los presos involucrados habían participado de un intento fallido de contrabandear drogas el mes pasado, en que un cargamento de cocaína fue arrojado desde un avión pequeño antes de que aterrizara. □

Justicia argentina exonera los Kirchner en caso enriquecimiento

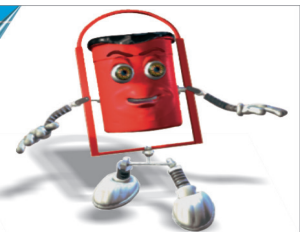
BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) - La justicia argentina sobreseyó el lunes al matrimonio de la presidenta Cristina Fernández y del ex mandatario Néstor Kirchner en una causa que investigaba si se habían enriquecido en forma ilícita, dijo una fuente judicial.

Fernández y su esposo, a quien sucedió en el cargo, es dueña de una fortuna de más de 45 millones de pesos (casi 12 millones de dólares), según su propia declaración pública, y fue acusada de engrosar sus fondos personales usando influencia política en

la compra y venta de tierras fiscales en la Patagonia, donde tienen su hogar.

Pero el juez federal Norberto Oyarbide no encontró argumentos probatorios para esa acusación y dictaminó la falta de delito. La investigación se concentró en determinar si había irregularidades en el incremento patrimonial del 158 por ciento que obtuvieron los Kirchner entre el 2007 y el 2008.

La revelación pública de esos datos motivó diversas denuncias presentadas por particulares y por agrupaciones políticas. □



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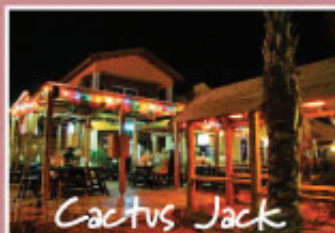


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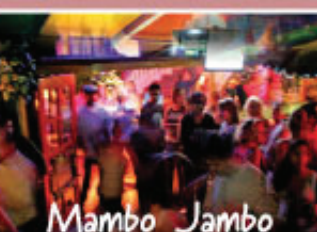
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